

ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS

Coverage of President Reagan's
remarks about the American
Embassy bombing in Beirut
with comments by V.P. Bush and
Senator Moynihan (ABC - Sam Donaldson);
Vice President Bush, Senator Moynihan and
~~Shane~~ Admiral Turner (CBS - David
Martin); NBC - John Chancellor;

Senator Moynihan, Vice President
Bush, Rep. Torricelli, Rep. Siljander
(MacNeil/Lehrer).

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
 27 September 1984

LEBANON/U.S.
 EMBASSY ATTACK JENNINGS: Former President Carter responded sharply today to a statement that President Reagan made during a campaign trip yesterday. Mr. Reagan left an awful lot of

people with the impression that blame for last week's bombing of the embassy in the Beirut should be taken by the Carter administration. Mr. Carter said today that President Reagan's comments were personally insulting, completely false and the president should apologize. Today, at the White House, they said they were not pointing the finger at President Carter and here's Sam Donaldson.

DONALDSON: President Reagan reacted angrily today to a widespread interpretation of his remarks on how curtailed intelligence ability had contributed to the Beirut bombing. PRESIDENT\RONALD\REAGAN: I will answer your questions about the way you have distorted my remarks about the CIA.

DONALDSON: Some news accounts had made it appear the president was blaming past administrations in general for hurting the CIA but other news accounts had made it appear the president was specifically blaming Jimmy Carter and his administration. That was not what the president said, complained White House Press Secretary Larry Speakes. 'The president,' said Speakes, 'was pointing to a decade long trend in the 70s, particularly a climate in Congress withering to intelligence agencies.' Well, here are the president's own words from yesterday. REAGAN: The real protection and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years. Before we came here, the effort that somehow to say well, spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents and we did that to a large extent. Your biggest protection is to, and we're trying to rebuild our intelligence, to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it.

DONALDSON: The White House insists the president was not attempting to shift some of the blame for the bombing to Jimmy Carter. And Vice President Bush said today Mr. Carter's policies were not to blame for the bombing. VICE\PRESIDENT\GEORGE\BUSH: No, I don't believe that, I don't think anyone can say that. But I do believe that there cuts made in the intelligence business that were inappropriate.

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DONALDSON: Democrats point out that shifts in CIA personnel in 1977 were recommended during the Ford administration and that the CIA budget started to rise in 1979, particularly to fight terrorism. The vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee thought the president had learned a lesson from all this.

SEN.\DANIEL\P.\MOYNIHAN (D.-N.Y.): If he could put the matter to rest it would be so much to the interest of the country. We have a bipartisan support for the intelligence community and it is necessary for the nation.

DONALDSON: The president often blames mistakes of the past for things without being anymore specific than that. But since his intention yesterday is now cleared up, it's not Jimmy Carter's fault, the question was asked here again today, who is to blame for the inadequate security in Beirut? And again today, the question went unanswered. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS
27 September 1984

LEBANON/U.S.
EMBASSY ATTACK

BROKAW: Now with this new controversy over who was at fault in the Beirut bombing, there may be a whole new issue in the campaign, and in his commentary tonight, John Chancellor suggests that the intelligence failure in Beirut may not have been in the past. John.

CHANCELLOR: The president got himself in hot water yesterday when he said that one of the reasons for the latest Beirut bombing is, in his words, 'the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years.' One of his aides said yesterday that Mr. Reagan was talking about the Carter administration, but today the White House said he was talking about a 10-year period of a decline in the 1970s, and that includes, says the White House, 'a weakening in traditional means of espionage during the Carter administration.' That would be the Halloween massacre as it has come to be known. In 1976, the Congress issued devastating reports on misdeeds in the CIA's clandestine services, and in 1977 the Carter administration purged the dirty tricks department of the CIA, which cut overall CIA strength by perhaps 5 percent. After that, the Carter administration began building up the CIA. The Halloween massacre upset a lot of old-line CIA-types, but it in no way produced anything like the near destruction of intelligence gathering. And the people purged were, in the main, old OSS, Ivy League, Cold War operatives who knew little or nothing about the Middle East. The sad fact is that many of the CIA's best Middle East experts died 17 months ago when the embassy in Beirut was blown up during the Reagan administration. One key point: when your intelligence is poor and you don't know what your enemy might do, you maximize your defenses against anything that might happen. If intelligence in Lebanon is as bad as the president says, American defenses against an attack should have been at full strength. They weren't. Maybe that's where the blame lies and not somewhere back in the 1970s.

PBS MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR
 27 September 1984

LEBANON/U.S.
 EMBASSY ATTACK

MACNEIL: The bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut last week, with 14 dead and some 90 wounded, erupted overnight into a big partisan political issue. Congressional Democrats were infuriated by President Reagan's remarks yesterday at Bowling Green, Ohio, answering a student's question about embassy security. According to an Associated Press transcript, he said, 'The real protection and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years, before we came here, the effort that somehow to say, "Well, spying is somehow dishonest, and let's get rid of our intelligence agents," and we did that to a large extent. Your biggest protection is to... And we're trying to rebuild our intelligence to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target time might be and be prepared for it.' Interpreting this as an effort to shift the blame for the bombing to the Carter administration, Democrats reacted in outrage. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told the Senate, 'I believe an apology is order. If one is not forthcoming, a motion of censure is in order.' Later, he elaborated.

SEN.\DANIEL\MOYNIHAN (D-N.Y.): The, what the president said yesterday was wrong, as a matter of fact, and I think he was wrong to say it. There, there are no party politics to opposing terrorists who are out to kill Americans abroad or at home. I would ask the administration in, without rancor, has there been a single request for funds to manage antiterrorist campaigns that has been refused? Has there been one? There has been none. We share their views. Now, why bring this into a political, ah, campaign?

MACNEIL: Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, a member of the Intelligence Committee, called the president's comment 'outrageous and beneath the dignity of the office of president of the United States.' Leahy added, 'How dare he try to escape his responsibilities? If he does not immediately retract his statement, we should rise up and say, "For shame, Mr. President, for shame. You shame your office." At the White House today, the president said the media had distorted his remarks. Vice President Bush, speaking in Saginaw, Mich., went out of his way to explain that Mr. Reagan was not trying to imply that the Carter administration was responsible for the bombing.

VICE\PRESIDENT\GEORGE\BUSH: Well, I think what he was talking about is the reduction in the so-called DDO, the operations side of the intelligence business, where we came in. And when, when I went out as director, the new administration came in, and the whole idea was, well, there's something wrong with the clandestine service. There's something wrong with doing the clandestine work that needs to be done to get the most intelligence. Ah,

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we've gone and started, I think, dramatically to build that up. But, ah, I, I think that's what the president was referring to. It's a very sensitive business. And when you go through what we went through not just in those Carter years, but earlier on, with the, ah, Church committee and all that, sources of intelligence dry up. There's no question about that. Any person experienced in tell (sic), in intelligence will tell you that. And it takes a long, long time to rebuild confidence from sources. Because they don't, you know, they find it very difficult to cooperate if they think that their cover is gonna be blown in public.

MACNEIL: Former President Jimmy Carter also reacted angrily to Mr. Reagan's remarks. In a statement issued through his Atlanta office, Mr. Carter said, 'The series of terrorist bombings in Beirut has been brought about by the president's deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger.' The former president added that for three and a half years he had listened with disappointment and anger to a steam of false assertions made by President Reagan in 'his attempt to blame his every mistake on me and others who served before him in the White House.' Carter said he had not responded to these many innuendos and deliberate misstatements of fact out of respect for the office, but that yesterday's claim that his predecessors are responsible for the repeated terrorist bombings of Americans is 'personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore.' At the White House, a spokesman said President Reagan did not mean to blame the Carter administration for the bombing in Lebanon, but rather to point to what the spokesman called 'a climate of opinion in Congress that reduced funds and support for intelligence gathering in the '70s.' Judy?

WOODRUFF: For a further look at how Capitol Hill is reacting to the Beirut bombing and the fallout from the president's comments on the intelligence community, we turn now to two House members who serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee. From Michigan is Republican Congressman Mark Siljander, and from New Jersey, Democratic Congressman Robert Torricelli. Both are also members of the Europe and Middle East subcommittee. First of all, Mr. Torricelli, do you think there's any merit at all to the president's charge that the intelligence operations in this country were severely downgraded, ah, during previous administrations? REP. ROBERT TORRICELLI (D-N.J.): Well, it clearly contradicts the facts. The, ah, in fact, the building up again of the Central Intelligence Agency began in the second year of the Carter administration. Funding, the number of personnel is now above where it has been at any other point, ah, in our country's history. So, no, I don't think it has merit.

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WOODRUFF: The point, ah, that was made today, I guess, by press secretary Speakes and, ah, I guess by Vice President Bush as well, is that, ah, they're really talking about human intelligence, the number of, of intelligence agents being cut back and the, an increasing reliance on scientific, ah, inform, ah, scientific intelligence. What about that part? TORRICELLI: I think that may be a good, ah, reason for, ah, for criticism. But that's a question of management. As, ah, Sen. Moynihan has said, every penny that the administration's asked for the Central Intelligence Agency, they have received. Nothing has been turned down. How they choose to spend that money, whether to use electronically or agents, is a question of management. And the CIA is being run by President Reagan's former campaign manager, so I think he's in a poor position to criticize that internal management.

WOODRUFF: That's true, Mr. Siljander, isn't it, that, ah, that the CIA is being run by, ah, Mr. Reagan and has been for the last three and a half years? SILJANDER: The central question centers around Beirut and the bombings, and the central question dealing with that issue is clear, that the clandestine end of the CIA during the Halloween massacre of 1977, as it's been known as (sic) historically, where 800 top clandestine agents were relieved of duty by one of Walter Mondale's now top aides in his foreign policy, in his campaign. The issue is, is clandestine so important to infiltrate terrorist groups and organizations, to help assist in advance warnings before tragedy, such as the last three that have occurred. Now I want to make it very clear that I don't think that this is the central or main reason for the bombing in our embassy of several days ago.

WOODRUFF: Well, that's what the president is suggesting. SILJANDER: The president has not suggested that, he has suggested, as I am suggesting, that this is certainly part of an overall problem of a decade of reduced budget in the clandestine area, amendments like the Hughes-Ryan amendment and like the executive order of President Carter in the '70s that all but disrupted the covert type of activities. So the Congress and Jimmy Carter and before Carter, as a matter of fact, have contributed to the essential dismantling of the clandestine element of our CIA operations. And that's a matter of fact and that's also a matter of history.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Torricelli, what about that and about his point that hundreds of agents were let go? TORRICELLI: Let me respond on the question of Lebanon that was raised in connection with this. I think there was never a prouder moment in this administration than when the president took responsibility as the commander in chief for the bombing in Beirut. And none where I have thought

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that he lacked leadership less than yesterday in trying to shift responsibility. This was a failure of management. The CIA has more funding than it's had before. The president's had four years to reform or improve or change the CIA in any way he wanted. The fact is after the last two bombings, the president came and requested more money for security in Beirut, \$17 million. He got every dime of it. The gate that was purchased with that money when the terrorists drove into the embassy was still sitting along the road. The security was not complete. It was a failure of management.

WOODRUFF: All right, Mr. Torricelli. SILJANDER: We're still building up. The truth is, you can't let go 800 of one's top agents that have been trained and developed an expertise over the years and then expect, as a radio, well, the radio's broke (sic) and we'll simply buy a new one to intercept operations. It's not an on and off situation, takes years of training. It takes many, many, many hours and years to train another 800 men and women who share in this relationship.

WOODRUFF: What about that specific point? TORRICELLI: I've been sitting in Congress now for two years. I've heard the administration come in relying on CIA estimates on the ground of communist activities in Central America and I've accepted those reports. The American people have been told that a \$1.8 trillion military was built up because of CIA estimates in the Soviet Union, uh, and the threat they posed to the United States, and I believed those reports. Now we're told the CIA isn't capable of infiltrating the Islamic Jihad and protecting 100 Americans in Beirut. Either the CIA isn't capable of any of those massive activities worldwide or it isn't capable of protecting 100 Americans, but it can't be both ways. This is not a courageous act by the president in trying to shift responsibility.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Siljander, Mr. Mondale was quoted late today as saying that by making these statements about his own CIA, the president is encouraging terrorism.

SILJANDER: I don't think so. The president has made just history clear. The terrorists know full well the activities with the Freedom of Information Act, which I mentioned, what they call the tragedy, 800 agents were let go. They also know the problems with the Hughes-Ryan amendment. We know all these things; the terrorists know these things. It's a matter of rebuilding. It's a matter of retraining. The CIA is getting better, our clandestine activities are certainly improving, but to this day they are certainly nowhere near where they should be... Let me

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just say, the blame, the blame of the bombing cannot be strictly on the fact that we have a poor clandestine activity.

WOODRUFF: OK, were you going to respond to that real quickly? TORRICELLI: I share that fear. More important even than the power or the capabilities of the CIA, may be the world's perception of those powers. For the president of the United States to down grade the abilities of the CIA, uh, to let the world know that he doesn't think they're capable of doing their job, is very, very dangerous.

WOODRUFF: What about, the call, Mr. Siljander, by, even by the conservative, some of the conservative Republicans, columnists, and so forth, who are normally supportive of the president, that somebody should be punished. That for this to happen three times in a little more than a year is inexcusable. How do you answer? SILJANDER: Well, having lost a constituent in the bombing in the airport and another Michigan resident in this recent bombing, one of the two was near my district in Michigan, certainly I agree that someone should be held accountable. The ambassador...

WOODRUFF: But who? SILJANDER: The ambassador typically is in charge of security. There was a gate, as Congressman Torricelli mentioned, lying on the ground, there was a lack of security, there was a lack of, of, expediting the ...

WOODRUFF: But the president has made no sound as if he thinks, as if plans to punish anyone. SILJANDER: See, this whole question centers around a comment President Reagan made to a student, and this has blown up into a major political...

WOODRUFF: No, I'm speaking of the whole question of responsibility. SILJANDER: The whole question of responsibility, the whole focus, has recently, in the last several days, arisen because of the recent bombing. Someone should be held accountable, I agree with that. I agree with many of my Republican colleagues, it's definitely a tragedy and something needs to be done to improve and expedite the security of embassies. And that's why the Congress is pushing a bill for over \$100 million to deal with that particular issue.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Torricelli, do you agree with Sen. Moynihan that the president should be censured if he doesn't take this comment back? TORRICELLI: I think that's an extreme answer for it. I think there are two things he should do, though, immediately. One, those people in the State

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Department, principally in the management office of the State Department, who are given the money to improve security, failed to do so and now, after 18 months of terrorist attacks, should be found and removed immediately. Second, the president should go to the CIA director and say to him, 'Mr. Casey you find out who this Islamic Jihad movement is, who's responsible for it, you do so immediately or I'll find somebody who can.'

WOODRUFF: It's an issue that doesn't go away almost a week after the incident. Thank you Congressman Torricelli, Congressman Siljander, for being with us. Robin.

LEBANON/U.S.
EMBASSY ATTACK RATHER: Over the past 24 hours, President and candidate Reagan made an effort to shift blame for lax security in the U.S. Embassy attack in Beirut. He blamed his predecessors in office, apparently trying to switch responsibility on to Jimmy Carter. White House spokesman Larry Speakes denies that. Other reactions have been swift and many. David Martin reports.

MARTIN: President Reagan today was busily backing away from his attempt to blame the latest terrorist bombing in Beirut on cuts made in intelligence operations by previous administrations. PRESIDENT\RONALD\REAGAN: I will answer your questions about the way you have distorted my remarks about the CIA.

MARTIN: The president didn't have anything to say later, but here's what he said yesterday to a student audience.

REAGAN: We're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years.

MARTIN: Although President Reagan didn't mention Jimmy Carter by name, the former president took offense.

JIMMY\CARTER: It's personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore.

MARTIN: Even Vice President Bush agreed that the Carter administration can't be blamed for what happened in Beirut. VICE\PRESIDENT\GEORGE\BUSH: I don't think anyone can say that. But I do believe that there were cuts made in the intelligence business that, ah, were inappropriate.

MARTIN: Bush should know. He headed the CIA during the Ford administration when, according to two former intelligence officials interviewed by CBS News, the agency's budget reached its low point, the result of cutbacks following the pullout from Southeast Asia. But classified documents show it was Jimmy Carter and his CIA director, Stansfield Turner, who increased the budget. SEN.\DANIEL\MOYNIHAN (Select Intelligence Committee): And they rose under Mr. Carter in each of his budgets, and they have risen under Mr. Reagan in each of his budgets.

MARTIN: Despite the budget increases, Turner is remembered as the man who eliminated 800 jobs from the CIA's operations branch. Turner insists those cuts did not hurt. STANSFIELD\TURNER (former CIA director): The Carter administration did not reduce one intelligence operative overseas. We did cut back on some of the bureaucratic fat in Washington.

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MARTIN: When the Reagan administration came in, the new CIA director, William Casey, began hiring back the veteran intelligence officers Turner had fired. But the bulk of the increases in the new Reagan intelligence budget was spent on satellites and other high-tech gadgets which are of little use against terrorists. MOYNIHAN: There's always a very limited capacity where you're dealing with terrorist organizations.

MARTIN: One former intelligence official pointed out that if President Reagan really believes the CIA has not yet recovered from the cutbacks of the '70s, he should have ordered tighter security at the Beirut embassy in order to compensate for inadequate warning of a terrorist attack.
David Martin, CBS News, Washington.